

Accession Number: 2  
Classification: Black Community  
Date: May 1, 1974  
Place: Evanston, Illinois  
Interview with: Robert (Bob) White Barbara Teising was present  
Interviewed by: Glenna Johnson and Thandie Mvusi  
Language Used: English  
Observations: This interview took place at Bob White's apartment. He is a member of the security force at Evanston Township High School. He is the son of an Alderman and the brother of an Alderwoman of Evanston's 5th Ward, primarily a black area.

1. Q. How old are you?

A. I'm 45 years old. I can remember back to when I was five years old.

2. Q. 1934?

A. Yes.

3. Q. 1934 seems to be a magical number among the people we have talked with. It comes up again and again. Do you have any idea if and why that number might have any particular significance?

A. 1934 was the year before things levelled off. The CCC Camp for was established. They wore uniforms and lived out in the forest preserve. The PWA Project which built the drainage tiles under Emerson Street was begun and then on both sides of the canal bank from Greenbay to Howard there were huge mounds of dirt to be moved, the canal drained and drudged. These things provided jobs which could have brought people into the community.

4. Q. Where did the dirt come from?

A. I don't know. Oh wait a minute, the dirt was used to fill in the lake.

5. Q. And you think these projects brought people into the community?

A. Yes, I think they did.

6. Q. Where did these people come from?

A. The majority from the South though some came from Chicago.







7. Q. Were these people recruited?

A. No, people were just floating around trying to find work anywhere it could be gotten. They came by night and left by night. There were a lot of vacant houses. People would appear in them and three months later disappear.

8. Q. Come by night? Leave by night? Why were the houses empty?

A. There was a small population then. People couldn't afford to keep their homes. Those who didn't have a job would settle in a vacant house and buy new furniture and 3 or 4 months later you would see the company pull up front and repossess it all. There just wasn't any money to pay for things.

9. Q. Did the established native Evanstonians consider themselves superior to the Southerners who were moving into the community at this time?

A. Yes, and that's true today, to a degree. The true Evanstonian had that feeling. People in Chicago still think the people who live in Evanston are rich.

10. Q. Do you know when your family first came to Evanston?

A. No. Mom and Dad both came here as kids. They went to Foster School. It must have been somewhere between 1898 and 1908.

11. Q. When blacks came up in the 1930's where did they settle?

A. Primarily on the West Side. Even in my boyhood there was a dividing line between the black and white communities at the railroad. The boundaries of the black community were primarily from Jackson Avenue the east boundary, to the canal the west boundary, from the north it was the canal as it swung around to Church Street.







13. Q. What about the enclaves where Weiboldt's now stands?

A. Where Weiboldt's is, was a shanty town of about 10 houses. The West Side was the nucleus with little spurs off it. There were also about six houses of blacks where Yesterday's is now.

14. Q. Why were the enclaves separate?

A. They were drifters.

15. Q. So true Evanstonians were in the nucleus?

A. Yes, that's right.

16. Q. Did they settle there by choice?

A. By choice or else for economic reasons. It was cheaper to live within the nucleus. Children have grown up and lived in their parent's homes there and will pass them to their children. This was true in the 1920's, people were buying homes then.

17. Q. The people who moved into the community, were they renters as opposed to buyers?

A. Yes, the enclaves were rent houses. Landlords wanted to rent rather than sell.

18. Q. Where were you born?

A. Hartrey Avenue. I was born in the family home. We talk about integration. Coach Agase lived in the next block from me and we played as children. He lived in the 1800 block and I lived in the 1900's block.

19. Q. Was the neighborhood generally mixed?

A. It was generally mixed. The Kuminsky's, the Agases, the Jorowskis, even an oriental family.







20. Q. Was there ever a solidly black community here?

A. At that time, no. There wasn't this black-white bit. People just sort of lived. There were whites living throughout the West Side.

21. Q. When I was a child in my home town, everything was integrated even the schools. It was quite a shock to come up here and find everything so different.

A. I went to Foster School which was all black except for a few whites who lived in our area. We had no contact with white people in school. When they threw us into the white high school I was in a state of panic. I didn't know how to handle it.

22. Q. Another interviewee told us that Evanston had black policemen and mailmen in the old days. I found that difficult to believe having come from the South where law forced integration in these areas during my life time.

A. Oh yes. There were mailmen and policemen up here. Hank White who is about 45 years old, his father was a detective on the Evanston police force. Now Hank White is too. I remember Mr. Sweat, our mailman. He was my Boy Scout Master too.

23. Q. Were the Boy Scouts integrated?

A. No. Troop 30, that's my troop, was a black troop. It covered the West Side.

24. Q. How big was the black community?

A. That's really difficult to say or even estimate. I suppose you could look up the census figures. Houses were not jammed together then. It was house, vacant lot, house, vacant







lot---like that. It's hard to estimate. Evanston itself was a small town in those days.

24. Q. When did the big expansion in Evanston population happen?

A. During the second war. People moved in for the war plants--- for the jobs. Douglass Airport, now Glenview Air Base was located around here as was Curtis airport.

25. Q. Were these factories built for war production or converted industries?

A. They were built. A lot of the old factories have been torn down now.

26. Q. And blacks were allowed to work in these plants?

A. Yes, just as laborers of course, nothing skilled though.

27. Q. Why did blacks moving North choose Evanston?

A. People moved to Evanston because Chicago had a reputation as a rough place and a hard place for blacks to make it.

28. Q. How did your family survive the depression?

A. Dad was fortunate. He drove a garbage truck for the city. At one time he didn't get paid a salary. The city gave him a script instead.

29. Q. What is a script?

A. It was a written note that allowed you to go into a store and get a certain amount of groceries or clothing. The city paid the merchants when they were able.

30. Q. This must have been a really good job to have in those times?

A. Oh yes. It was a steady job with no lay offs. I remember so well. They had relief. People went to the health department on Maple Street where people got bushels of food and clothes. They could get fruits and vegetables. People on relief ate better than we did. We could only afford potatoes and beans.







We would have been better off on relief. The children on relief had shoes that squeaked. We used to call them charity shoes. I have a pair of shoes now that squeak and I call them my charity shoes.

31. Q. Was there a sense of pride or superiority among those who had jobs over those who were on relief?

A. Yes, this class bit came in during the depressions and hangs on.

32. Q. What did your father do before the city job?

A. He just jobbed around.

33. Q. How did he get his job with the city?

A. Well, he was buying a home. He had been in Evanston a long time. I guess he just looked permanent, like a good risk.

34. Q. Tell me about black people's church?

A. Ebenezer Church had all the old 60 or 70 year old people on the board. The young people had no role and were not allowed to participate. I left and went to Bethel where I was able to become a Steward. You'll find old people to talk to at Bethel. At Ebenezer the people are snooty. Bethel is an offshoot of Ebenezer. The people at Bethel---you'll see them in house dresses---at Ebenezer people <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ always worried about what you had on.

End of Session



